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UNCLAS LAGOS 001428

SIPDIS

DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAYE
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENANDER
DOC FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE PASS EX-IM FOR JRICHTER AND KVRANICH
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND JEDWARDS
STATE PASS TDA FOR NCABOT AND BTERNET

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EPET](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: LAGOS FUEL PRICE PROTEST WENDS PEACEFULLY THROUGH CITY

REF: A) LAGOS 1416 B) LAGOS 1398 C) LAGOS 1397

1. The September 14 protest rally and march (against fuel price increases) in Lagos concluded peacefully. Police estimate 30,000 to 50,000 protestors gathered at the Lagos State Government Complex in the city's Alausa district. A protest letter was presented around 1:30 p.m. Protestors remained at the scene until nearly 4:00p.m.

2. Police recorded only one incident of attempted violence, when several youths attempted to carjack a vehicle in the procession. Mobile police, stationed at regular intervals along the protest route, chased the culprits away without having to use their weapons. For the rest of the time, unarmed police escorts accompanied the protestors. Newspapers reported two labor activists from the United Action for Democracy (UAD) were arrested the day before the rallies for carrying incendiary protest leaflets. They are still in custody.

3. One rally participant reported surprise that protestors moved so quickly and easily through the city. He noted past labor actions had been marred by opportunistic hoodlums who set street fires in the early morning, then proceeded to loot and commit other crimes by mid-afternoon.

4. The next rally is planned for Friday, September 16 in Benin City, Edo State, where violent protests against the fuel price increase have already occurred. Benin has also been troubled by political violence due to internecine Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) rivalries. Keeping the peace in Benin City may be more of a challenge than it turned out to be in Lagos. Nevertheless, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) officials contend that they had enough safeguards in place to prevent any problems in Lagos, and expect the Benin City rally to conclude similarly.

5. Labor leaders were happy with the turn-out. Both participants and state government officials felt cooperation between Lagos State government entities and labor was better than ever before. (Note. It was no surprise that the anti-Obasanjo Lagos State Government would accommodate this populist protest. It is good electoral politics. End Note.) Some observers expect that the GON may acquiesce to a 1 or 2 naira decrease in fuel prices by the end of the series of rallies, but many, including a civil servant in the Lagos State economics office, believe the rallies will have little affect on the government. Peter Akpatasson, President of NUPENG, the union representing junior-level petroleum workers, hailed the rally as a good beginning for preparing negotiations with the President. He also said it gave poor and struggling Nigerian workers a viable alternative to a strike for expressing dissatisfaction with government policy. While this is true, protests like these will have little import on the GON. For now, it appears that the GON has won the initial round of its face-off with labor over fuel price deregulation. The irony is that, while Labor may have the present sympathy of the population, the GON's position on deregulation is more attuned to the country's long-term interests.

BROWNE